**GANDHARA ART**

**Background**

Gandhara was an ancient region in the Peshawar basin in the north-west of the [ancient Indian subcontinent](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ancient_Indian_subcontinent), corresponding to present-day north-west Pakistan and north-east [Afghanistan](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Afghanistan). The center of the region was at the confluence of the [Kabul](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kabul_River) and [Swat](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Swat_River) rivers, bounded by the Sulaiman Mountains on the west and the Indus River on the east. The [Safed Koh](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Safed_Koh) mountains separated it from the [Kohat](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kohat_District%22%20%5Co%20%22Kohat%20District) region to the south. This being the core area of Gandhara, the cultural influence of "Greater Gandhara" extended across the Indus river to the [Taxila](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Taxila%22%20%5Co%20%22Taxila) region and westwards into the [Kabul](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kabul_River) and [Bamiyan](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bamiyan%22%20%5Co%20%22Bamiyan) valleys in Afghanistan, and northwards up to the [Karakoram](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Karakoram) range. During the [Achaemenid period](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Achaemenid_Empire%22%20%5Co%20%22Achaemenid%20Empire) and [Hellenistic period](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hellenistic_period), its capital city was [Pushkalavati](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pushkalavati%22%20%5Co%20%22Pushkalavati), modern [Charsadda](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charsadda%22%20%5Co%20%22Charsadda). Later the capital city was moved to [Peshawar](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peshawar) by the [Kushan](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kushan%22%20%5Co%20%22Kushan) emperor [Kanishka the Great](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kanishka_the_Great%22%20%5Co%20%22Kanishka%20the%20Great) in about 127 AD.

**Origin**

Gandhara was known in Sanskrit as gandha and in [old Persian](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Old_Persian) as Gadara.The meaning of gandha is "perfume" and "referring to the spices and aromatic herbs which they [the inhabitants] traded and with which they anointed themselves.

The beginnings of Gandharan artistic tradition can be traced to the 1st century BCE with the waning of the tradition occurring approximately in the 8th century CE and included painting, sculpture, coins, pottery and all the associated elements of an artistic tradition

**Geography**

The boundaries of Gandhara varied throughout history. Sometimes the Peshawar Valley and [Taxila](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Taxila%22%20%5Co%20%22Taxila) were collectively referred to as Gandhara; sometimes the Swat Valley (Sanskrit) was also included. The heart of Gandhara was always the Peshawar Valley.

**History**

Gandhara has been historically known since the Achaemenian Empire and more specifically during the reign of Cyrus the Great (558-28 BCE). It has been speculated that Ganhara was a triangular tract of land about 100 kilometers east to west and 70 km north to south, lying mainly to the west of the Indus River and bounded on the north by the Hindukush Mountains. (1 li = 500 meters or 1640 feet)

In ancient times, Gandhara was a trade crossroads and cultural meeting place between India, Central Asia, and the Middle East. The region was subject to Achaemenian Persia in the 6th and 5th centuries BCE and was conquered by Alexander the Great in the 4th century BCE. It was thereafter ruled by the Mauryan dynasty of India, under whom it became a center for the spread of Buddhism to Afghanistan and Central Asia. Gandhara was then successively ruled by Indo-Greeks, Shakas, Parthians, and Kushans. After its conquest by Maḥmūd of Ghazna in the 11th century CE, the region was held by various Muslim dynasties.

Taxila and Peshawar, ancient Gandhara’s chief cities were important cultural centers. From the 1st century BCE to the 6th–7th century CE, Gandhara was the home of a distinctive art style that was a mixture of Indian Buddhist and Greco-Roman influences.

### Stone age

Evidence of the Stone Age human inhabitants of Gandhara, including stone tools and burnt bones, was discovered at Sanghao near [Mardan](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mardan%22%20%5Co%20%22Mardan) in area caves. The artefacts are approximately 15,000 years old. More recent excavations point to 30,000 years before the present.

### Vedic Gandhara

Gandhara was an ancient kingdom of the Peshawar Valley, extending between the [Swat](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Swat_River) valley and Potohar plateau regions of Pakistan as well as the Jalalabad district of northeastern Afghanistan. In an archaeological context, the Vedic period in Gandhara corresponds to the Gandhara grave culture. Gandharas are included in the [Uttarapatha](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Uttarapatha%22%20%5Co%20%22Uttarapatha) division of Puranic and Buddhistic traditions.

**Language**

The language used by inhabitants of Gandhara was the Kharosthi script, which died out about the 4th century. However, Punjabi, [Hindko](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hindko%22%20%5Co%20%22Hindko), and [Kohistani](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kohistani_language), are derived from the Indo-Aryan [Prakrits](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prakrit%22%20%5Co%20%22Prakrit) that were spoken in Gandhara and surrounding areas. However, a language shift occurred as the ancient Gandharan culture gave way to Iranian attackers, such as the Pashtun tribes from Central Asia that began settling the region.

**Architecture**

It was the proliferation of stupas and other associated religious establishments such as monasteries which formed the core of the regional identity for nearly 1000 years.

The Stupas were built mainly for the reverence of the remains of Buddhist masters and the most important ones held the remains of the Buddha himself. Besides the Buddha, monks of high stature were also venerated by having stupas built for them and these edifices also marked the places where certain legendary events related to the various lives of the Buddha were said to have occurred. The proliferation of stupas across India is said to have been the hallmark of Asoka's rule who reinterred the ashes of the Buddha in multiple stupas all across his kingdom.

Even though it was mainly an architectural feat, the stupa nonetheless was a vessel for the display and worship of the prolific Gandharan art, encompassing sculptures, reliefs, paintings and other highly decorated elements that covered the structure and added hugely to not just its beauty but its worship as a religious site. These images stood against walls, in courts, inside niches and chapels and stuccos adorned the walls of the stupa courts and monasteries.

One of the most well-known remains is the Double Headed Eagle stupa in Sirkap which contains its namesake motif of the double-headed eagle affixed on three different type of decorative arches namely the classical greek, persian and indian style of arch. This shows the degree of intermixing of cultures in the region which we can deduce from the archaeological remains.

**Jewelry**

Most of Gandharan’s jewelry shows a strong Greek influence. Earrings often consist of discs from which hang down tiny chains terminating in beads or sometimes-small gold-erotes, or cupids, in repousse. Different types of jewelry are so far found in these excavations. These include the strings of beads hanging from her belt and below; the former even have pendants in the form of small squatting figures. From the discs at the ends of the massive earrings hang, fringe-like, small strings of beads, and part of her belt is composed of round ribbed beads.

**Rise and fall of Gandhara**

Lord Rama’s brother Bharata and his wife Mandavi, a cousin of Sita, had two sons named Taksha and Pushkal. Bharata conquered the Gandhara region and ruled it. Two cities emerged in the valley surrounding the Kabul and Swat rivers, named after Bharata’s two sons – Taxila, named after Taksha and Peshawar named after Pushkal. The early settlement of these two great cities later became the basis for the Gandhara civilisation. Gandhara became a vassal state of the Sassanid Empire of Persia in 241-450 CE. The arch enemies of the Sassanids, the Hepthalite Huns, have an ambiguous identity: they are sometimes called the White Huns and sometimes described as a mixture of Turkic and Iranian tribes. They captured the Gandhara territory in around 450 CE. The White Huns did not adopt Buddhism.

Another monk Song Yun visited Taxila in 520 CE. He came across an incredible experience, when he met a Bodhisattva who cut his own head and offered it to another – or so he recorded in his records. By the time Xuanzang, 602-664 CE, another Chinese monk and traveler, arrived in the Kingdom of Gandhara, it was already in ruins. The great realm in which the kingdom existed was now a shambles – the villages were dilapidated the roads were shabby and unkempt. The Buddhist monasteries gave a forlorn look. The Huns had finally destroyed the kingdom.